

What is Link Crew?

Link Crew is a freshman transition program.

Preparation

This begins with Link Crew Leader visits and information getting out to the eighth graders and their parents in the spring.

Orientation

Link Crew orientation is phenomenal! Students are welcomed and wow-ed. The orientation is a combination of opening and closing assemblies and a small group session of 10 students led by a Link Crew Leader.

Yearlong support

The same Link Leader that led the new students on orientation day will provide social and academic support throughout the school year. Link Leaders are also trained to teach life skills lessons in freshman classrooms at various times during the year.

Link Crew is a Leadership training program.

Your school's juniors and seniors will be trained in team building activities, cooperative skill development, and discussion skills. Each of these Link Leaders then receives a list of 10 freshmen to telephone and personally invite to the orientation, to work with at orientation, and to stay in touch with throughout the school year. They become leaders, motivators, role models, and teachers.

Link Crew is a school community building program.

Your school climate will change because of Link Crew. Link Crew is based on a simple concept: linking freshmen with successful upperclassmen. While creating a sense of comfort for the incoming students, the Link Crew concept also addresses the attitudes of the upperclassmen toward the freshmen, and respect for freshmen becomes the norm.

Link Crew Objectives

- to empower juniors and seniors as role models for freshmen.
- to increase academic success through support of peers.
- to develop Leadership skills in students on your campus.
- to allow successful older students to pass on positive traditions to younger students.
- to expose students to a variety of individuals at your school in positive situations.
- to teach students that by working together they can be successful and enjoy one another.
- to help create a supportive and positive atmosphere on your campus.

Statistics

Number of schools trained:

1,583

Number of educators trained:

5,431

Approximate number of
students affected in 2008-2010
school year:

1 million

David Douglas High School, Portland OR

71% reduction in freshman disciplinary referrals
48% reduction in freshman absences

Dodgeland High School, Juneau, WI

13% reduction in freshman failure

Mt. Vernon High School, Mt. Vernon, WA

1999: 2.5 fights per week first 6 weeks of school
2002: 0 fights first 6 weeks of school

Cathedral High School, Cathedral City, CA

58% reduction in freshman referrals

Apollo High School, Glendale, AZ

50% reduction in freshman truancy

Boulder High School, Boulder, CO

1997: 20 freshman hazings
1999: 0 freshman hazings

Orono High School, Orono, MN

45% reduction in freshman cigarette use
78% reduction in alcohol use by freshman males

Porterville High School, Porterville, CA

29% reduction in freshman absences

Chaparral High School, Parker, CO

3% reduction in percentage of failing freshmen

Mckinleyville High School, Mckinleyville, CA

35 % reduction in freshman absences

Mt. Pleasant High School, San Jose, CA

39% reduction in freshman referrals and 60%
reduction in freshman expulsions
55% reduction in suspensions after second year of
Link Crew

Golden Valley High School, Merced, CA

Excessive tardies: dropped 72%
Fighting: dropped 23%
Minor disruptions: dropped 66%
P.E. non suits: dropped by 76%
Truancies:

- 1st step: dropped 87%
- 2nd step: dropped 35%
- 3rd step: dropped 13%

Other areas that showed improvement on campus:

- Alcohol and drug use: dropped 50%
- Dress code violation: dropped 23%
- Failure to serve saturday school: dropped 41%
- Gang attire: dropped by 86%
- Tobacco possession: dropped 83%

How Link Crew Supports Freshmen

1. A written invitation to orientation

Invitations are mailed to all eighth graders' homes in the spring.

2. Link teams

All freshmen are divided into Link Crews of 8 - 10. Each Crew is assigned a Link Leader who will serve them as a mentor and a friend for the year.

3. Link phone call

Link Leaders telephone each of their freshmen to extend a personal invitation a few days before orientation.

4. Link orientation

Orientation for freshman Crews is run in separate classrooms by the Link Leaders. The focus of activities is: a) getting to know other students, and b) learning strategies for being successful at this school.

5. Link Leader support

Link Leaders phone and check-in with their freshmen periodically throughout the year, particularly during the first few weeks of school.

6. Link Alerts

A Link Alert is a special form filled out by a teacher who sees a freshman needing help or encouragement. The form is routed to the Link Leader who takes appropriate action, then re-routed back to the original teacher.

7. Academic Follow Ups

An Academic Follow Up is a lesson taught in all freshman classes or in an advisory meeting time by Link Leaders. Lesson topics include Making Good Choices, Using Resources on Campus, and Dealing with Peer Pressure.

8. Social Follow Ups

The Link Crew sponsors social events on campus to help freshmen and Link Leaders stay connected. Some examples are: movie nights, lunches, and attending school events together.

How Link Crew Teaches Leadership

1. Link Leader training

All Link Leaders attend an intensive 12-hour training prior to orientation. Topics include group management, leading activities and discussions, and dealing with problem situations that might arise.

2. Link Crews

Each Link Leader is assigned a team of 10 freshmen to mentor through their first year of high school. They receive phone numbers and class schedules for each of their ninth graders. Initial pre-orientation contact with the freshmen is a personal phone call from the Link Leader. During the school year, the Link Leader is responsible to check in with those freshmen, to support them in academics and social situations. Link Leaders may also get messages via Link Alerts from teachers of their freshmen, and they are expected to handle the information and the situations responsibly.

3. Link Orientation

Each Link Leader then gets to practice the skills learned at training by leading her/his freshman Crew through a small group session on orientation day.

4. Academic Follow Ups

An Academic Follow Up is a lesson taught by Link Leaders in freshman classes or in an advisory meeting time. Link Leaders attend a two-hour training that continues the Leaders practice and understanding of leadership and group dynamics. Follow Up topics include Making Good Choices, Using Resources on Campus, and Striving for Excellence.

5. Link Commissioner

The Link Commissioner is the "student leader" of the Link Crew. He/she works directly with the coordinator to help with the details and maintenance of the program.

6. A-team

The A-team is a group of four to five students who work to support the logistics of the orientation day. These students are commonly sophomores who are interested in applying for the Link Crew during the following school year.

Program Requirements

A good Link Crew program must provide...

For Freshmen	For Coordinators	For Link Leaders
Link Crew orientation	Link Crew training (3 days)	Link Crew t-shirts
Classroom Follow Ups	Support	summer training
Social Follow Ups	Conferences - 2 per year - Follow Up (1 day) - Refresher (2 days)	meetings - 1 per month
Leader Initiated Contacts	Planning time (e.g., release meetings once a term/period, release days, etc.)	May Development Day

A better Link Crew program also provides...

For Freshmen	For Coordinators	For Link Leaders
Link Alerts & Link Applause	Additional trained Coordinators	mailboxes
new student tours	Link Commissioner	Link Crew class
	A-team	
	trained administrator	

Even more possibilities include:

- freshman tutoring program
- new staff orientation
- eighth grade visits
- new parent orientation
- cross-age support (feeder schools)

Commonly Asked Questions

How is the Link Crew program any different from any other freshman orientation program?

Link Crew is not a freshman orientation program, it is a freshman transition program. Individual Link Leaders start working with individual ninth graders before school even starts, and their guidance and assistance continues throughout the entire year through classroom visits, one-on-one meetings, Link Alerts, and Link social activities.

Aren't these kids just "playing games" at orientation? What happened to teaching about the rules?

No "games" are played at Link Crew orientation. There are activities, but each activity fulfills a certain purpose in the entire program of the day. The new students do a few warm-up activities during the opening assembly to help them "loosen up" and feel more comfortable on campus. Then during the small group session, each Link Leader will lead get-acquainted and team building activities for her/his freshman Crew of 10. It is at this time that many students will begin to create their first peer relationships at the high school. They also start to develop that very important friendship with the Link Leader, who will serve as mentor during their first year on campus.

The last activity in the small group session requires more risk on the part of the ninth graders, for it is during this period that the teams participate in cooperative activities that mirror some of the tough choices they will have to make as high school students. At this time, Link Leaders talk to them about choosing success in school.

Do the freshmen really come if the orientation is held before school even begins?

The Link Crew program is built for success. Knowing that most high schools run their freshman orientation programs before the school year begins, a system for personal invitations has been developed. Each school sends out formal invitations to the orientation in late spring; then just a week before the opening day of school, each and every freshman student receives a personal telephone call from a Link Leader inviting him or her to this special day. Most schools find that 60-90% of the freshman attend this orientation, even if it takes place before school starts. Attendance at most sites increases with each year of the program, as the positive reputation for the Link Crew orientation builds in the school community.

What's the purpose of a "transition program" for freshmen, anyway? We never had that when I was in school.

Schools today are different than ever before, as are students, families, and our communities at large. The transition from middle school to high school is one of the most difficult

A Year in the Life

What follows is a calendar of typical activities from an active Link Crew program.

August

- Finish all preparation for training and orientation.
- Database is created: every freshman is listed with her/his Link Leader.
- Spend two 6-hr. Days with a-team making nametags, supply bags, etc.
- Training day: 12 hours with Leaders, doing all training and small group preparation for orientation. All incoming freshmen are telephoned at this time.
- Orientation day, about 1 week before school starts.
 - opening assembly - approx. 1 1/2 hours
 - small group session 1 - approx. 2 hours
 - closing assembly - approx. 30 minutes

September

- First meeting, second week of school. Re-energize Leaders, explain Link Alerts, and mailboxes. Create committees for the school year.
- Staff memo, refreshing memories for use of Link forms.
- All Leaders contact their freshmen during the first two weeks of school.
- Link Leaders serve as guides for parents on Back-to-School night.
- 1st quarter Follow Up lessons are taught in 9th grade classes.
 - selected Link Leaders attend a 2-hr. Training, including lesson activities, classroom management, etc.
 - Leaders teach lessons freshman classes.
 - Leaders are evaluated by teachers, results are passed on to Leaders and used to improve training for next quarter.
- Coordinators and student commissioners attend a workshop with others from throughout the state, where orientations at each site are critiqued, suggestions for improvement of the program are discussed. New Follow Up lessons for freshman classes are presented on this day as well.

A Year in the Life

October / November

- Meeting with all Link Crew Leaders to re-ground, to re-focus, and to brainstorm ideas for staying connected with freshmen.
- 2nd quarter Follow Up lessons are taught in 9th grade classes.
- Link "calling cards" (a card with the freshman's Link Leader's name and phone number on it) are created for all freshmen and distributed.

December

- Schedule third quarter Follow Up lessons.
- Make sure all forms and systems are in place for the new Crew selection and all spring activities.

January/February

- Meeting with entire Link Crew to reconnect, announce events, etc.
- 3rd quarter Follow Up lessons are taught in 9th grade classes (lesson topics include: Setting Goals, Making Good Choices, Accepting Differences in Others, Building Lasting Relationships with Others, Using Resources on Campus).
- Link Leaders set up lunchtime visitations to the middle schools.
- Link Leaders speak to parents at eighth grade parent night.
- Staff recommendations for next year's Link Leaders are collected.
- Letters and applications are distributed to recommended sophomores and juniors.
- Application time period is generally two weeks.
- Names of all applicants are entered into a database, which is copied and sent out to staff for confidential comments.

A Year in the Life

March/April

- Selection of next year's Link Leaders is made by coordinators based on applications and staff comments.
- Acceptance letters are delivered, inviting new Link Leaders to two meetings: The "old-new meeting" where they gather information, and the May Development Day one week later, where they do Link activities and begin team building.
- Rejection letters are delivered.
- A-Team is selected: a hand-picked team of 8-10 future sophomores. (this is the team of errand-runners who help with set-up and details at the orientation.)
- Planning and preparation for May activities.
- Begin organizing details of summer training and orientation day: transportation, press releases, facilities reservations, t-shirts, training barbecue/snacks, supplies, signs, etc.
- Send articles about orientation to middle schools for parent newsletters.
- Coordinators attend 2-day Refresher workshop with other Link coordinators from across the nation. It is here that the latest revisions to the Link transition program are presented, and coordinators get re-energized in preparation for the spring and summer work.

May

- Old-new meeting two hour meeting during the school day where the "old Crew Leaders" get to share successes, strategies, etc. with the "new Crew Leaders".
- Certificates of participation are distributed to all "old" Link Leaders.
- Link Crew service awards are given to outstanding Link Leaders.
- May Development Day - A two to three hour meeting in which selected old Crew Leaders work as Leaders with the new Crew Leaders to teach activities, work on team-building, etc.
- Continue working on details of training and orientation.

A Year in the Life

June

- Continue working on details of training and orientation.

July

- Mail first reminder card to Link Leaders regarding summer training.
- Mail invitation and bus schedule (if necessary) to 8th grade families.

Throughout the school year

- Counselors provide Link Crew with data on each new student that enrolls. Upperclassmen are welcomed by a Leader. New freshmen are assigned to a Link Leader for the year.
- Link Leaders periodically check in with their freshmen informally.
- Teachers, counselors, and administrators can seek help for freshmen using Link Alerts.
- Leaders are notified each time one of their freshmen serves detention.

Sample Yearlong Timeline

Based on a traditional high school calendar

Phase I – Preparation

Before the end of school you must:

- Meet with Administration for scheduling and budgeting.
- Host a staff meeting.
- Recruit your Link Crew Leaders.
- Select your Link Crew Leaders.
- Host May Development Day.
- Notify eighth grade parents of orientation date.
- Send note to Link Crew Leaders to remind them of training dates.
- Create t-shirt design and order shirts.

Phase II – Orientation

6 days before training.

- Send note to Leaders to remind them of training dates.
- If you are going to host a lunch for the freshmen, you should have it ordered at this time.

Week of training

- Gather supplies, get name tags, prepare food for training
- *before training*
- Create Crews of ninth graders and print crew roster to hand out to Leaders at end of day.
- *at end of training day 1*
- Make name tags.
- *1-2 days before orientation*
- Have master Crew rosters ready.

2 to 3 days before "O"

- Train Link Crew Leaders.
- A-team kids prepare supply bags.
- Communicate the detail plan with Coordinator team.

Sample Yearlong Timeline

Based on a traditional high school calendar

Phase III - Long-term Connections

September

- **First day of school** - Link Crew Leaders wear t-shirts and direct traffic in hallways.
- **Back to school night** - Link Crew Leaders hand out schedules, act as tour guides, help parents find classrooms and answer questions.
- **First dance of the year** - Link Crew Leaders bring their Crew to the dance, Leaders get in free, Crew gets a discount.

Coordinator attends
Follow-Up training in September

October

- **Academic Follow Up #1 - Using Your Resources** - lesson that reviews the people and places the ninth graders can connect with in order to be successful.
- **Crew Lunch Day** - Link Crew Leaders eat with their Crew.
- **Homecoming** - have a special tailgate party! Crews join their Link Crew Leaders.

November

- **Academic Follow Up #2 - Perspectives** - lesson that allows ninth graders to explore how different perspectives can co-exist.
- **Thanksgiving Lunch with Crews** - Crews gather with their Leader for a special lunch to check in.

December

- **Holiday Party** - either just with your Link Crew Leaders, or Leaders and Crews. Make it fun!
- **Final exam prep** - set up stations for each subject before school, after school or as your schedule allows. Have Leaders at each table to help out. Provide food and advertise it. Make it the cool thing to do.

January

- **Crew Lunch Day** - Leaders eat with their Crews. Treats provided.
- **Link Movie Night** - Leaders and Crews in the gym. Lay out the wrestling mats, get a big screen.

Sample Yearlong Timeline

Based on a traditional high school calendar

Phase III - Long-term Connections (cont.)

February

- **Academic Follow Up #3 - Achieving Excellence** - this follows first semester grades in order to motivate students to do better second semester.

March

- **Academic Follow Up #4 - Goal Setting** - done in conjunction with scheduling and class selection for next year.
- **Spring Egg Hunt** - before school with Leaders and Crews only.
- **Crew Lunch Day** - Leaders eat with their Crews. Treats provided.

Coordinator attends
Refresher training in March

April

- **Ice Cream Social** - Leaders and their Crews.
- **Academic Follow Up #5 - Building Relationships That Last** - to help ninth graders realize what is needed to build strong, long-term relationships.

May

- **After School BBQ** - celebration of the end of the year with Leaders and their Crews
- **Ninth graders write good-byes and thank yous to their Leaders.**
- **Link Crew Leaders write letters to their ninth graders.**

June

- **Crew Lunch Day** - hand out the thank you letters to the Link Leaders and from the Link Leaders.

On-going Activities

- **Link Alerts** - teachers send in alerts when a ninth grader needs a little extra attention. Link Leader immediately touches base with ninth grader.
- **Link applause** - notes sent to ninth graders when something good happens.
- **Tutoring** - Link Leaders run a tutoring program.
- **Monthly meetings with Link Crew Leaders** - check in with Leaders to keep them motivated and focused on ideas of ways to connect with their Crew members. Have fun activities for the Leaders; also have skill building instruction, so the meetings have substance. Use these monthly meetings to introduce teaching, psychology and leadership theory and practice.

Adult Roles & Definitions

Link Crew Coordinator

Anyone who has gone through the official three day Link Crew training and coordinates the Link Crew program on campus.

Coordinator Responsibilities

If you are trained at the three day training, you are a Link Crew coordinator. This means you and the other coordinators who are trained with you, are responsible for running all aspects of the Link Crew program. Your coordinator team will organize and facilitate the process of Leader training, run the opening day orientation (including logistics and presentation) and keep the program alive throughout the year with a variety of Follow Up activities. While you are all a team, it is important that one of you be the primary contact for the program so that students and other staff members, as well as Boomerang Project, will know who to contact with questions and information.

Primary Contact:

Homework!

The coordinators must have an excellent working relationship. Spending time together to delineate responsibilities will allow for a smooth year long process. You should have a meeting immediately upon returning to school (if not already starting the dialogue here at the training) to begin the process of delineating responsibilities and tasks. Here are some questions that can help guide your meeting:

1. What do you see as the responsibilities of a coordinating team?
2. How will you divide those responsibilities?
3. In what ways do you want to contribute?
4. When will your team meet to discuss and develop the program?

Link Crew Support Team

This is a team made up of other staff members who have not been to the three day Basic Training.

Support Team Responsibilities

The support team works as direct support to the Coordinator(s) in the selection of Link Crew Leaders, preparing for the training, preparing the logistics for the orientation day and keeping the program going throughout the year.

Possible Support Team:

Homework!